



PUBLIC OPINION: AN INTRODUCTION

To gauge public awareness of library services, understanding of library funding and governance, and support for public library facilities, the study team conducted a telephone survey of 1,000 residents statewide in January 2001.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

To create a random sample that would be representative of the state population as a whole and accurately reflect the range of opinion in communities of all sizes and types, the study team used a random systematic sampling procedure that gave each resident in the sample universe an equal opportunity of being selected for an interview.

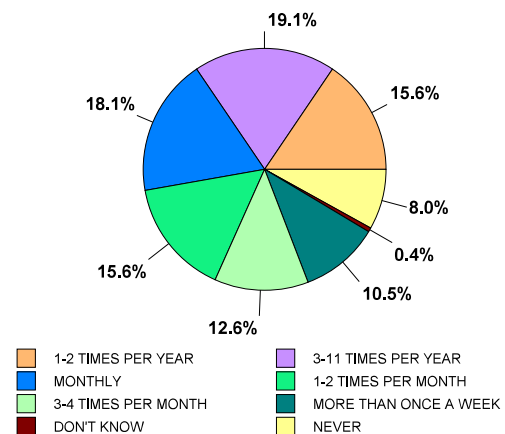
To accurately reflect the varied conditions of Utah's public libraries, the study team divided its samples into three categories: Wasatch Front (Davis, Salt Lake, Utah, and Weber counties), Growing Regions (Box Elder, Cache, Morgan, Summit, Tooele, and Washington counties), and Rural Regions (Beaver, Carbon, Daggett, Duchesne, Emery, Garfield, Grand, Iron, Juab, Kane, Millard, Rich, San Juan, Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Uintah, Wasatch, and Wayne counties). To ensure adequate representation for the less populated areas, the study over-sampled in growing and rural communities.

The survey team asked to speak to one of the heads of the household and asked that person if he/she would be willing to respond to a brief survey about "services funded by tax dollars." Only 4 out of the sample of 1,020 refused to participate.

Respondents were 50.8% male, 49.2% female. Most were registered voters (87%) who had lived in the community at least two years (88%), had completed at least some college or technical education (82%), and had personal computers in

their homes (85%). Almost all (92%) visited the library at least once per year, and more than half (62%) went at least once a month.

VISITS TO LIBRARY



QUALITY AND VALUE OF LIBRARIES

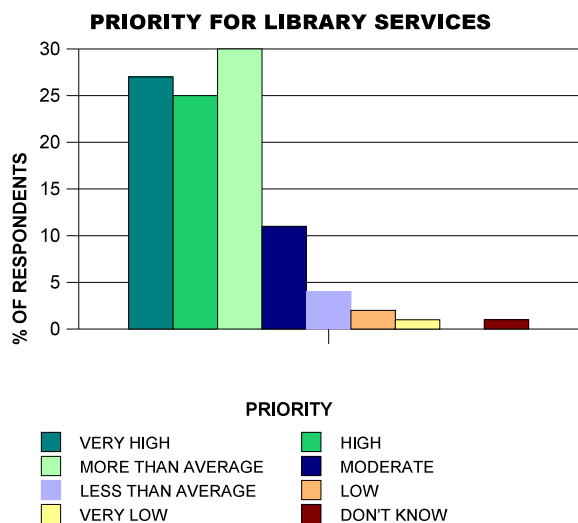
The first group of questions focused on the public perception of the quality and value of library services.

Asked to rate public services in their community, participants ranked most services as average or slightly above average, with the highest scores given to fire and emergency medical services. Libraries had a mean score of 5.59, above the average. Residents along the Wasatch Front tended to be more satisfied with their libraries: half felt their library met their needs very well. Those in rural and growing areas were less satisfied: nearly one in seven said that their public library did not meet their needs, and only 38% in growing areas and 33% in rural areas felt that their library met their needs well. Asked what priority libraries should have among all of the services provided by city or county government, 52% said that library services should be given a very high priority, and only 3% thought they should have a low priority.



PERCEIVED USE AND DEMAND

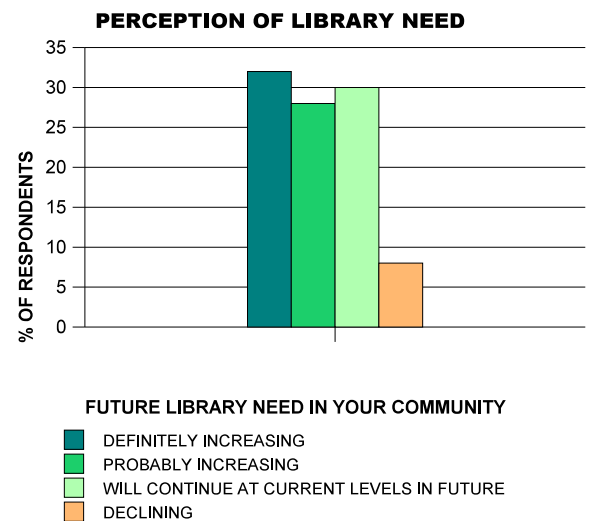
Utah residents consider library services a high priority: 82% of respondents ranked the library as more important than average, and more than half (52%) ranked it in the highest levels of importance (6,7). Only 7% considered public libraries a low priority.



Survey respondents were asked whether they thought that public library use in their communities had increased, decreased, or remained the same over the past few years, and whether they anticipated that the need would increase in the future. Most believed that library usage had increased (35%) or remained constant (36%) in the recent past and expected that it would definitely or probably continue to do so in the future (60%). Only 8% expected it to decline in the future.

When asked specifically about the potential impact of the Internet on library use, the majority of respondents felt that it would definitely or probably increase the need for public libraries (25%) or not affect the need (37%); only 10% believed that Internet access would definitely decrease the need. Those with lower family income and those who did not have a computer in

their home were the most likely to believe that the Internet would definitely increase the need for public libraries. Half (51%) of those who thought that library use would increase noted that people would go to the library to use the Internet.



When asked what discouraged them from visiting their public library, participants identified six major factors: hours of operation (7%), distance from or location of the library (6%), availability of parking (2%), limitations of the collection (13%), personal commitments and schedules (9%), and a lack of interest (2%). Other factors included crowding, fines, and availability of the Internet. Registered voters, people with computers in their homes, and people with Internet access in their homes were more likely to mention needing additional and current holdings. For those with children and those in locations remote from their public library, distance was a significant factor.

PERCEIVED FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

Many residents were not aware of how heavily their libraries depend on community support.



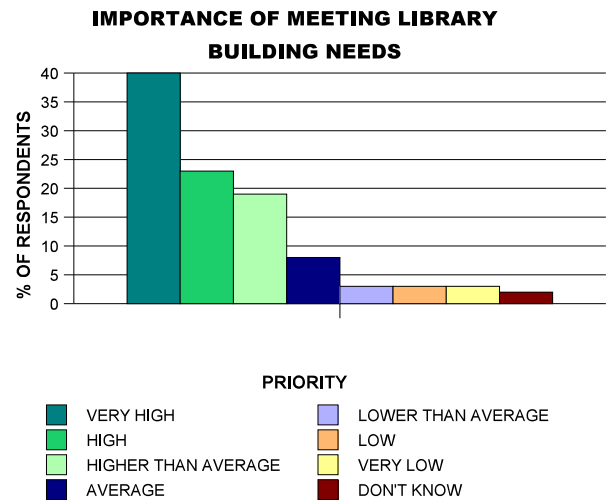
More than half of those surveyed (56%) admitted that they did not know which level of government was primarily responsible for funding their public library. Residents tend to assume that the State of Utah provides funds for local public libraries: 3% of respondents in rural and growing areas and 6% on the Wasatch Front directly identified the state as having primary funding responsibility for their local public libraries. When those who did not mention the state as a funding source were asked specifically about state funding, 38% believed that local public libraries received state funds.

STATE ROLE IN ADDRESSING LIBRARY BUILDING NEEDS

After asking what participants knew about library funding and governance, the survey team then provided a brief explanation. In fact, the state provides funds only for ongoing services, not for facilities needs. State operating funds for community public libraries (approximately 45 cents per person) amount to less than 2% of the total funds received by the libraries.

The majority of survey participants believed that this level of funding was probably (26%) or definitely (30%) too low.

A large majority (71%) also believed that the state should provide funding “to help cities and counties improve existing library buildings or build new library buildings,” in addition to providing funds for ongoing operations. Improving library buildings to meet current standards for “safety, handicapped access, library service, and technology” was very important to state residents: 40% considered modernization very important, and 82% ranked improvements above the median in importance.



Thus the survey supported anecdotal evidence from librarians and visual evidence from library walk-throughs. Utah’s residents use their local public libraries heavily, depend on them for essential services, expect that the facilities will comply with current codes and standards, and want their state government to provide financial support for library buildings and services.